

שִׁיחָה Shabbot in the Mountains

August 8-11, 2013
Wildacres Retreat, Little Switzerland, NC



The Binding of Abraham, Isaac, Sarah
and the Rest of Us

The Binding of Abraham, Isaac, Sarah and the Rest of Us

Dear Participants of the 2013 Sicha Shabbaton,

Welcome to our weekend, high in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where we will join a centuries' old conversation with the biblical story, The Binding of Isaac.

When we listen carefully and add our voices to the ongoing conversation, we discover a place for ourselves within a long tradition of asking questions, of voicing doubt, of solidifying belief; we uncover a tradition and vocabulary of praise, of surprise, and of protest, disappointment, and outrage.

We have not invented perplexity, impiety, or uncertainty. We join a conversation in which many before us have imagined themselves as Abraham, as Isaac, as Sarah. The conversation demands and ensures the ongoing search for meaning, the ongoing quest for new questions. The conversation is a characteristic of belonging to a people that refuses to let its founding stories have the last word.

We engage this story, just weeks before it is read in the synagogue on Rosh HaShannah. May our learning make for a "noisier" reading this year. May we come to understand that we are not lonely, merely contemporary, readers; but that we are well represented and invested in a conversation whose voices describe Jewish life.

Shana Tova,
Rabbi Steven Sager



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Sicha
continuing the conversation

Genesis 22:1-19

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
 וְהַאֱלֹהִים נִסֵּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיכָם
 אַבְרָהָם
 וַיֹּאמֶר הָנָנִי.
 וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא
 אֶת־בֶּן־
 אֶת־יְחִידָךְ
 אֲשֶׁר־אַהֲבָתָךְ
 אֶת־יִצְחָק
 וְלֹךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיא
 וְהַעֲלִيهוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה
 עַל אֶחָד הַהֲרִים אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֶלְכֶךָ
 וַיַּשְׁכַּם אַבְרָהָם בְּבֹקֶר
 וַיַּחֲבֹשׂ אֶת־חַמְרוֹן
 וַיַּקְרֹחַ אֶת־שְׂנִי נָעָרָיו אֶת־
 וְאֶת־יִצְחָק בֶּן־
 וַיַּבְקַע עַצְיָה עַלְהָה
 וַיַּקְרֹם וַיַּלְךְ
 אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם
 אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לוֹ אֱלֹהִים.
 בַּיּוֹם הַשְׁלִישִׁי
 וַיֵּשֶׁא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עַיִנּוֹ
 וַיַּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מַרְחֹק.
 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל נָעָרָיו
 שִׁבְוּ־לְכָם פֶּה עַמְּחַמְּוֹר
 וְאַנִּי וְהַנֶּעֶר נִלְכָה עַד־פֶּה
 וְנִשְׁתְּחֹווּ וְנִשְׁׂוֹבְהָ אֲלֵיכֶם.
 וַיַּקְרֹחַ אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עַצְיָה הַעֲלָה
 וַיַּשְׁכַּם עַל־יִצְחָק בֶּן־
 וַיַּקְרֹחַ בָּיִדוֹ
 אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַמְּאַכְּלָת
 וַיַּלְכֹּו שְׁנִיהם יְחִידָוָן.

¹It was after these things
 that God tested Abraham
 and said to him
 Abraham
 and he said, Here I am.
²And He said, take now
 your son
 your only one
 whom you love
 Isaac
 and go to the land of Moriah
 and offer him there as an offering
 on one of the mountains as I will tell you.
³And Abraham rose in the morning,
 saddled his ass
 and took his two servants with him
 along with Isaac, his son;
 he split the offering wood,
 got ready and went
 to the place
 of which God had spoken to him.
⁴On the third day
 Abraham raised his eyes
 and saw the place afar off.
⁵And Abraham said to his servants
 stay here with the ass
 while I and the lad go up there
 and we will worship and return to you.
⁶Abraham took the offering wood
 and put it on his son Isaac's back
 and he took in his hand
 the fire and the knife
 and the two of them walked on together.

וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק
 אֶל-אֶבְרָהָם אָבִיו
 וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי
 וַיֹּאמֶר הַנֶּגֶן בָּנִי
 וַיֹּאמֶר הַנֶּה הַאָשׁ וְהַעֲצִים
 וְאֵת הַשָּׂה לְעַלֵּה.
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶבְרָהָם
 אֱלֹהִים יְרַא-לוּ
 הַשָּׂה לְעַלֵּה בָּנִי
 וַיָּלִכּוּ שְׁנֵי הָמָן יְחִידָוָה.
 וַיָּבוֹא אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם
 אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לוּ הָאֱלֹהִים
 וַיַּבְנֵ שְׁם אֶבְרָהָם
 אֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
 וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת-הַעֲצִים
 וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת-יִצְחָק בָּנוֹ
 וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶתְוֹ עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
 מִפְּעָל לְעַצִּים.
 וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶבְרָהָם אֶת-יָדוֹ
 וַיִּקְחֵח אֶת-הַמְּאַכְּלָת
 לְשַׁחַט אֶת-בָּנוֹ.
 וַיַּקְרָא אֶלְיוֹ מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה
 מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶבְרָהָם אֶבְרָהָם
 וַיֹּאמֶר הַנֶּגֶן.
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-תִּשְׁלַח יְהִי
 אֶל-הַנְּגָעָר וְאֶל-תִּעֲשֶׂה לוּ מְאוּמָה
 כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי
 כִּי יְרָא-אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה
 וְלֹא חִשְׁכַּת
 אֶת-בָּנֶךָ אֶת-יְחִידָךְ
 מִפְּנֵי.

⁷Isaac speaking
 to Abraham his father
 said, My father
 and he said, Here I am, my son;
 said Isaac, Here are the fire and the wood
 but where is the lamb for the offering?
⁸And Abraham said,
 God will see to it himself regarding
 the lamb for the offering, my son
 and the two of them walked on together.
⁹They came to the place
 of which God had spoken to him
 and Abraham built there
 an altar
 and he arranged the wood,
 bound Isaac his son
 and placed him on the altar
 on top of the wood.
¹⁰Abraham reached out his hand
 and took the knife
 to slaughter his son.
¹¹And an angel of the Lord called to him
 from the heavens
 and said, Abraham, Abraham
 and he said, here I am.
¹²And he said, Do not lift your hand
 against the boy or harm him in any way
 for now I know
 that you are a God fearer
 in that you have not withheld
 your son, your only one
 from me.

וַיֹּשֶׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עַיִנָּיו
 וַיַּרְא וְהַנֶּה-אִיל אַחֲר
 נָאָחוֹ בָּסְבָּךְ בְּקָרְנוֹ
 וַיַּלְךְ אַבְרָהָם
 וַיִּקְחֶחֶת הַאִיל
 וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה
 תְּחִתְתָּ בָּנוֹ.
 וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם
 שֵׁם-מָקוֹם הַהוּא
 יְהוָה יְרָאָה
 אֲשֶׁר יֹאמֶר הַיּוֹם
 בְּהָר יְהוָה יְרָאָה.
 וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה
 אֶל-אַבְרָהָם שְׁנִית
 מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם.
 וַיֹּאמֶר בַּי נִשְׁבַּעֲתִי נָאָס-יְהוָה
 כִּי יִעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂית אֶת-הַדְבָּר הַזֶּה
 וְלֹא חִשְׁכַּת
 אֶת-בָּנֶךָ
 אֶת-יְחִידָךְ.
 כִּי-בָרַךְ אַבְרָהָם
 וְהַרְבָּה אֶרְבָּה אֶת-זָרָעָךְ
 כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וְכָחָול אֲשֶׁר עַל-שְׂפַת הַיּוֹם
 וַיַּרְשֶׁת זָרָעָךְ אֶת שַׁעַר אִיבָּיו.
 וְהַתְּבָרְכוּ בָּזָרָעָךְ כָּל גּוֹיִי הָאָרֶץ.
 עַקְבָּב אֲשֶׁר שְׁמַעְתָּ בְּקֹולִי.
 וַיִּשְׁבַּב אַבְרָהָם אֶל-נְעָרָיו
 וַיִּקְמֹנוּ וַיַּלְכוּ יְחִידָוּ
 אֶל-בָּאָר שְׁבָעָה
 וַיִּשְׁבַּב אַבְרָהָם בָּבָאָר שְׁבָעָה.

¹³Then Abraham raised his eyes
 and saw a ram behind
 caught in the thicket by its horns;
 then Abraham went
 and took the ram
 and offered it as an offering
 instead of his son.

¹⁴Abraham called
 the name of the place
 Adonai Yireh
 as it is said to this day,
 on the mountain of the Lord one is seen.

¹⁵And an angel of the Lord called
 to Abraham a second time
 from the heavens.

¹⁶He said, I swear by my Self says the Lord
 that because you did this thing
 and you did not withhold
 your son
 your only one.

¹⁷I will surely bless you
 and certainly multiply your seed
 as the stars in the heavens
 and as the sands on the sea shore
 and your seed will seize the gates of its enemies.

¹⁸And all peoples of the earth will be blessed by your seed
 since you listened to my voice.

¹⁹Then Abraham returned to his servants
 and they made ready and went together
 to Be'er Sheva
 and Abraham dwelled in Be'er Sheva.

Genesis 22:1-19
 Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

Everyone is Abraham

כל אחד שפָּשַׂכִּים בְּפֶקֶר הוּא לְבָדֶךָ
 הוּא מַבְיאָת עַצְמוֹ לַעֲקָדָה, הוּא אֶבְרָהָם,
 הוּא יִצְחָק, הוּא הַמְּמוֹר, הוּא הַאֲשָׁר
 הוּא הַמְּאַכְּלָת, הוּא הַמְּלָאָךְ,
 הוּא הַאִיל, הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים.

Everyone who gets up in the morning is alone,
 bringing himself to the binding, he is Abraham,
 he is Isaac, he is the donkey, he is the fire
 he is the knife, he is the angel,
 he is the ram, he is God.

Yehuda Amichai
 Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager



Legacy

<p>האיל בא אחרון ולא ידע אברהם כי הוא משיב לשאלת הילך, ראשית-אנו בעת יומו ערב.</p> <p>נשא ראשו השב. בראותו כי לא חלם חלום ומ מלאך נאכ- נשרה הפאכלה מידו.</p> <p>הילך שהתר מאסוריו ראה את גב אביו.</p> <p>יאחיק, כמספר, לא העלה קרבן. הוא חי ימים רבים, ראה בטוב, עד אור עיניו כהה.</p> <p>אבל את השעה היה הוריש לצאצאיו. הם נולדים ומאכלת בלבם.</p>	<p>The ram came last but Abraham did not know that it answered the boy's question, his waxing potency in his waning day.</p> <p>The old man raised his head. When he saw that he was not dreaming that the angel stood firm- the knife fell from his hand.</p> <p>The boy, freed from his bonds, saw his father's back.</p> <p>Isaac, as it is told, was not sacrificed. He lived a long life, saw the good, until his eyes dimmed.</p> <p>But that hour he bequeathed to his descendants. They are born with a knife in their hearts.</p>
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Hayyim Gouri, "Legacy"
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

The Binding of Sarah

A son was born to Abraham when he was one hundred years old. Yet, in the end, the Holy One said to him: *Take your son... and offer him as a burnt offering* (Genesis 22:2). Then Abraham, our father, made a three day journey, as it is written: *On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar* (Genesis 22:4). What did he see? He saw a cloud encircling the top of the mountain. He said to his son: My son, do you see what I see? Isaac answered: Yes. Abraham continued: And what do you see? Isaac answered: I see a cloud encircling the top of the mountain.

Abraham then said to his servants: Do you see the same thing that we see? No, they replied. Abraham said: Since you see nothing and the ass sees nothing, you stay here with the ass (Genesis 22:5)—you who are the ass people. What did Abraham do next? He took Isaac his son and climbed to the top of the mountain. Then he built an altar and arranged the wood, set the kindling in place, and bound Isaac on the altar. Abraham took the knife in his hand to slaughter him. Had not the Holy One, blessed be he, said: *Do not raise your hand against the boy* (Genesis 22:12) Isaac would have been slaughtered!

When Isaac returned to his mother, she said to him: My son, what did your father do to you? Isaac answered: Father brought me up mountains and down hills until he brought me to the top of a particular mountain. Next, he built an altar, arranged the wood, and set the kindling in place. Then he bound me on the top of the altar and took the knife in his hand to slaughter me. Had not the Holy One, blessed be he, told Father: *Do not raise your hand against the boy*, I would have been slaughtered.

She said to him: Oh! No! Son of an ill fated mother! If the Holy One, blessed be he had not said do not raise your hand against the boy you would have been slaughtered! She had barely finished saying this when her soul left her. As it is written immediately after this—*Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to cry over her* (Genesis 23:2). Where did he come from? He came from Mount Moriah where he had bound Isaac.

(from Pesikta d'Rav Kahanna 25:3)

Akedah

עֲקֵדָה



S. Shifra
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

The Binding

חֲרָמְקָוָל צָרָה The loudspeaker barked
וְ"קַחְיִ נָא אֶת יְחִידָךְ, “take your only one,
אֶת זֶה אֲשֶׁר אַמְבָתָךְ. the one you love.”
וְהַמְזַבֵּחַ חֲרוֹס. עַצִּי And the altar is ruined. The wood of
הַמְעָרָבָה פּוֹזְרִים. הַנְּעָרִים the pyre scattered. The kids
מְגַלְגָּלִים בְּדִירִי roll balls of
אַהֲבָה עַל-פְּנֵי דְשָׁא love across the grass
אֲעִירּוֹתָם. לִשׁוֹנָם in their youthfulness. Their tongues
חָמָה. הַמְאַכְּלָתָ נוֹצָאת hot. The knife flashes
בְּנוֹאָדִי לְאוֹר יְרָם in the wadi by the moon’s light
שֶׁל אַמְצָעַ הַגְּבוּל. at the middle of the border.
הַמְלָאָךְ מֶלֶכְךָ, זֶה The white angel, the one
שְׁפַתְמִיד צֹעָק who always shouts
וְ"אֶל נָא תִשְׁלַחֵי יְדָךְ" “don’t lift your hand”
בְּחַפְשָׁה רְגִילָה. is on regular leave.

Aliza Shinar
 Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

[אָנָּי לֹא אַקְרֵיב] [I Will Not Offer]

אָנָּי לֹא אַקְרֵיב I will not offer

בְּכֹרִי לְעֹלָה my first born as a sacrifice
לֹא אָנָּי. not me.

בְּלִילּוֹת אֱלֹהִים וְאָנִי During the nights God and I
עֹרְכִים חִשְׁבּוֹנוֹת arrange our accounts
מָה מָגִיעַ לְמַיִ. what is owed to whom.

אָנִי יוֹדֵעַ וּמְפִירָה I understand and recognize
תָּנוֹךְ. thanks.

אָבָל לֹא אַת בְּנִי But not my son
וְלֹא and not
לְעֹלָה. for an offering.

Ra'ayah Harnick
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager



The Binding of Abraham and Isaac: The Two Walked On Together

The binding story of Genesis 22 twice observes of Abraham and Isaac that *the two of them walked on together*. The repetition frames the only conversation between the father and son—a fact not lost on ancient sages. For them, the conversation broke an uneasy silence but resolved into a silence of solidarity and mutual commitment.

Here is the Bible text followed by the rabbinic expansion of the story.

וַיִּקְחֶה בְּיַדּוֹ	And he took in his hand
אֶת-הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת-הַמְּאַכְּלָת	the fire and the knife
וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיָהֶם יְחִידָה.	and the two of them walked on together.
וַיֹּאמֶר יְצָהָק	⁷ Isaac speaking
אֶל-אֶבְרָהָם אָבִיו	to Abraham his father
וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי	said, My father
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי בְּנִי	and he said, Here I am, my son;
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהַעֲצִים	said Isaac, Here are the fire and the wood
וְאֵיֶה הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה.	but where is the lamb for the offering?
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶבְרָהָם	⁸ And Abraham said,
אֱלֹהִים יַרְאָה-לֹו	God will see to it himself regarding
הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה בְּנִי	the lamb for the offering, my son
וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיָהֶם יְחִידָה.	and the two of them walked on together.

The Two Walked On Together

(an ancient rabbinic tale, expanded)

Abraham and Isaac left the servants and the ass behind and ***the two of them walked on together*** carrying only provisions for the sacrifice. Abraham carried the fire and the knife, while Isaac carried the wood. Any passerby would see at a glance that they carried only what was necessary for a sacrifice except —curiously— the sacrifice, itself.

Along with their ritual implements, pilgrims always carry their doubts. Legend says that in these canyons, even their silent ambivalence echoes, coming back to them from all angles. *There is no speech*, said the psalmist, *and yet their voice is heard*. Questions of resolve and commitment rise; they take voice and they take shape. Samael which means, *God has heard*, is the human shape of a pilgrim's doubt. Each pilgrim must reckon with the angel, Samael, who can appear in the guise of a fellow traveler.

As ***the two walked on together***, Samael went to father Abraham and chided him: What is this, old man! Have you lost your mind? Are you really on your way to slaughter a son granted to you at the age of one hundred?! I am, said Abraham. Samael replied: And if your God sets another test, do you imagine that you would bear that one, as well? I do believe it, Abraham said. Samael continued: And let's imagine that tomorrow your God condemns you as a murderer—what then? I will be guilty, Abraham replied.

Seeing that he could not provoke Abraham, Samael went to Isaac, saying: You are the son of a very unhappy mother! Don't you know that you are your father's sacrifice? Isaac replied: Because I accept my fate, the sacrifice is not his, alone; it is also mine. Well then, said Samael, I suppose that your half brother, Ishmael, will inherit all of those beautiful clothes that your mother made just for you.

Now, words are sometimes effective in part even if they are not completely effective. Hence, it was a shaken Isaac who broke the silence with his father by saying: *Father...* He spoke like a child so as to arouse his father's compassion. Abraham responded in kind: *Yes—my son*. Isaac continued: *Here are the fire and the wood—but where is the lamb for the offering?*

Abraham thought: Samael has gotten to him! I'd like to drown him! Abraham answered Isaac quietly. His slow cadence and inflection carried the truth—but only for one who knew how to listen. *God will see to it himself...* *Regarding the lamb for the offering?*—*my son*. The servants would not have understood. But Abraham was certain that Isaac knew: *the offering is my son*. And now, once again, silence prevailed as ***the two of them walked on together***—one prepared to slaughter, the other to be slaughtered.

(Based on Genesis Rabbah 56:4)

The Binding of God

(Two Interpretive Legends)

Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife—He reached for the knife even as the tears streamed from his eyes. And these tears, prompted by a father's emotion dropped into Isaac's eyes. Yet even so, Abraham's heart rejoiced to obey the will of his Creator.

Protesting angels assembled into groups up above. Their cries soaked into the very mountain from which a prophet would someday wring them and tell the story: *Angels of peace wept bitterly... They complained: He has broken the covenant! He rejects the cities!* (Isaiah 33:7-8) The angels were outraged that God was ready to break the covenant with Abraham—a covenant to make Isaac's children into a nation. God was taking no pleasure in the Temples that would be built on the mountain, each Temple in its own Jerusalem—the very city that he promised to give to Isaac's descendants! *He despises the man*, the prophet continued, the man to whom he has made a solemn vow. And if that man, Abraham, had no merit then no creature had any value to God! The angels were angry, disappointed, and frightened.

(based on Genesis Rabbah 56:8)

Abraham named the place Adonai Yireh, which means, The Lord Sees, or The Lord Takes Note, or The Lord Provides (Genesis 22:14). But what did Abraham have in mind by so naming the mountain? Rabbi Bibi the Elder said in Rabbi Yohanan's name: Abraham said to God: Master of the Universe! When you ordered me: *Take your son, your only son* I could have answered by saying that yesterday you swore to me: *It is through Isaac that offspring will be continued for you* (Genesis 21:12) and now you say: *Take your son?!* But heaven forbid that I should act that way. I suppressed my compassion in order to do your will. And now, whenever Isaac's children are in trouble, you must remember that binding in their favor and be filled with compassion for them!

Therefore, **Abraham named the place Adonai Yireh**— meaning Adonai, Take note! This very mountain binds you to see, to take note, and to provide for Isaac's children throughout the generations.

(based on Genesis Rabbah 56:10)

The Binding of the Mountain (1)

אֱלֹהִי יִצְחָק, עֲנָנִי, אָמַר הָר שֶׁנְּעָקֵד לְמִקְומָו
 וְאֱלֹהִי יִצְחָק נָעַנָּה
 וּבָא וְבָא
 וְהַתִּיר לְהָר לְנוּעַ.

God of Isaac, answer me, said that mountain bound to its place
 and the God of Isaac answered
 and came
 and freed the mountain to move.

Rivka Miriam
 Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

The Binding of the Mountain (2)

קַח אֶת בָּנֶךָ אֶת יְחִידָךְ אֲשֶׁר אַהֲבָת,
 וְהַעֲלָהוּ לְעֹלָה, כִּד אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם.
 וְאַנְחָנוּ קֹרְאִים לוּ אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ. אַיִלָּה אָב
 הַוָּא לְנוּ, שְׁהִיה מַוְּכוֹן לְמִקְרֵיב אֶת בָּנוּ עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ?
 דָּבָר אַחֲרָה, אֱלֹהִים לֹא יְדַע אַהֲבָה לְבָנִים,
 אֲבָל הַוָּא יְדַע אַהֲבָה לְהָרִים
 וּמְכֹל הַהָּרִים אָהָב אֶת הַר הַמּוֹרִיה
 הַר יְחִידָה אֲשֶׁר אָהָב וְלֹכֶן עָשָׂו עָלָיו
 אֶת הַעֲקָדָה וְאֶת בְּתֵי הַמִּקְדֵּשׁ.

Take your son, your only one whom you love
 and offer him as an offering, so God to Abraham.
 And we call him Abraham our father. What kind of father
 is he to us who was ready to sacrifice his son on the altar!
 Another interpretation, God did not know love for children,
 but he knew love for mountains
 and of all the mountains he loved Mt. Moriah
 his only mountain which he loved and so upon it took place
 the binding and the two Temples.

Yehuda Amichai
 Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

The Real Hero of the Binding Was the Ram

הגבור האמתי של העקידה היה האיל
שלא ידע על הקוניגיה בין האחרים.
הוא כמו התנדב למות במקום יצחק.
אני רוצה לשיר עליו שיר זכרון,
על האמר המתולטל ועל עיניו האנושיות
על הקריםים שהיו שקטות כל כך בראשו
ואחר שנשחת עשו מהן שופרות
לקול תרועת מליחמותם
או לקול תרועת שמחתם הגסה.

אני רוצה לזכור את התמונה האחרונה:
כמו נצלום יפה בעתו אפנה מעדן:
העיר השזורה והמפנק בגדיו המגנדרים
ולידו המלאך הלבוש שמלה משי ארקה
לקבלת פנים חגיגית.
וشنיהם בעיניהם רוקות
מביטים אל שני מקומות רקם
ומאחריהם, קרקע צבעוני, האיל
נ Achoz בשבך בטרם שחיטה.
והשבך ידידו האחרון.

המלאך הלך הביתה
יצחק מלך הביתה
ו אברהם ואלהים הלו מזמן.
אבל הגבור האמתי של העקידה
הוא האיל.

The real hero of the binding was the ram

who didn't know of the conspiracy among the others.

He apparently volunteered to die in Isaac's place.

I want to sing a memorial song about him.

About curly wool and about his human eyes

about horns so quiet on his living head

that after slaughter they made into shofars

to trumpet their wars

or to trumpet their crude joy.

I want to remember the last picture

like a beautiful photograph in an glitzy fashion magazine:

the young man, tanned and pampered, in his fancy clothes
next to him the angel dressed in a long silk gown

fit for a party.

The two of them with vacant eyes

staring at two empty places

and behind them, like a colorful backdrop, the ram
caught in the thicket before the slaughter.

The thicket his last friend.

The angel went home

Isaac went home

Abraham and God were long gone.

But the real hero of the binding

is the ram.

Poem by Yehuda Amichai,
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

Graphic design by Galia Goodman



Deeds of the Ancestors

וְאַחֲרֵי הַעֲקָדָה?
 אֶזְהָרְכִּיל הַגְּסִיּוֹן הַקְּשָׁה מַכְּלָם.
 אַבְרָהָם לְקַח אֶת בֶּןוֹ לִמְרוֹאֵci גָּמְלִים.
 טִיל אֶתוֹ מִנְהָר פְּרָת עַד נְהָר מִצְרָיִם,
 שְׁחָה לְצָדוֹ, מְשַׁגִּיכִים בְּשָׁבָע עִינִים,
 בְּמִימֵי אַיִלָּת. וּבְשׁוֹבָם הַבִּיתָה,
 שְׁחַת צָאן וּבָקָר לִרְבָּב,
 הַפְּלָל רַךְ וּטוֹב.
 נִיחָח שִׁירִים וּבָשָׂרִים וּשְׁרָרִים
 וּקְרוֹאִים טֻבִּי-עַיּוֹן מִפְּרָחָק.
 יָצַחְק אָכֵל וְאָכֵל, אָכֵל
 וּשְׁתָק.
 אַבְרָהָם קָנָה לְאַשְׁתוֹ מַעַיל פְּרָנוֹה,
 עַדְיִים מִזְהָב-פְּרוּוִים.
 הַתִּקְנוּ לָהּ תְּאֹוֹתָה-חֲרוּם בְּאַחַל,
 הַבִּיא לָהּ מַגְפִּים מַאֲרָם-גָּהָרִים,
 חַשִּׁיש מִתְּרָשִׁיש,
 קָנָמוֹן מִלְבָנוֹן.
 שָׁרָה, שְׁבַלְתָה בָן לִילָה,
 לֹא פִשְׁטָה אֶת בָּגְדִי הַאֲבָלוֹת.
 אַבְרָהָם הַתִּפְלֵל לְאֱלֹהִים שְׁחָרִית וּעֲרָבִית.
 תָּלָה קְפּוֹת-צְדָקָה עַל כָּל הַאֲשָׁלִים.
 עָשָׂה תּוֹרָתוֹ לִילָה וּיוֹמָם.
 צָם,
 וְהַלִּין מַלְאָכִים בְּחָצֵי חֶנְמָם.
 מַקְוָל מִפְּרוּם נְעָלָם.
 וְהַקְוָל שְׁבַתּוֹכוֹ
 (הַיְחִיד שְׁנוּתָר לוֹ)
 אָמָר : כֹּו, הַלְכָת,
 מִאָרָצָךְ וּמִפּוֹלְדָתְךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ,
 וּעֲכָשְׂיוֹ, סּוֹף-סּוֹף, מַעֲצָמָךְ.

And after the binding?
 Then began the most difficult trial of all.
 Abraham took his son to camel races,
 hiked with him from the Euphrates to the Nile,
 swam with him, watching him with seven eyes,
 in the waters of Eilat. And when they returned home,
 slaughtered lots of sheep and cattle,
 everything tender and good.
 A pleasing fragrance of songs, meat and muscle
 and well-wishers from afar.
 Isaac ate and ate, ate
 and was silent.
 Abraham bought his wife a fur coat,
 and fine gold jewelry.
 He installed emergency lighting in the tent,
 he bought boots as a present from the fertile crescent,
 hashish from Tarshish,
 cinnamon from Lebanon.
 Sarah, who withered overnight,
 never shed her mourning clothes.
 Abraham prayed to his God morning and evening.
 He hung charity boxes on all of the tamarisk trees.
 Learned his Torah night and day,
 fasted,
 offered shelter to angels for almost nothing.
 The voice from above ceased
 And the voice within him
 (the only one left him)
 said: Yes, you left,
 your land, your birthplace, and your father's house,
 and now, at the end, you have left yourself.

T. Carmi

Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager